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THE STORY

PROLOGUE.—While dependent over the enforced hiding of her fiancé, Jim Dallas, slayer in self-defense of Homer Parkinson, a member of an affluent family, Sybil Saunders, popular actress, is engaged to play Viola in a charity performance of "The Night on Gull Island, on the Maine coast. In the company are Sybil's bosom friend, Annie Tracy, Annie's brother Joe, young waitress, and Aleck Stokes, an actor infatuated with Sybil.

CHAPTER I.—After the play, which is a big hit, Wally Shine, official photographer, learns something of the jealousy, professional and otherwise, existing in the company.

CHAPTER II.—The launch was on its way back for those of the actors who were leaving. Gabriel, squatting by the engine, calculated the distribution of his time. After he'd taken them across he'd have his supper and go back for Joe Tracy, who was leaving on the seven-fifteen for his vacation. When Joe was disposed of, Gabriel was to meet two Boston sports who had engaged him for a week's deep-sea fishing at White beach, twenty-five miles down the coast. It was a strenuous program for the old man, and he grumbled to himself about it, the grumbling gaining zest by anticipations that some of them would be late. By the time he drew near the island he had grumbled himself into a state of irascible defiance against anyone who would dare upset his plans.

To warn them of his coming he sounded the whistle, and his shrill foot acted like a magic summons. A group of men, bearing suitcases and bags, emerged from the entrance and ran down the path, Bassett following.

Gabriel quieted down—they were all ready and waiting—and then saw Joe Tracy come round the corner of the house in his Sebastian dress. The old man muttered profanely—why wasn't the d-d boat getting ready? And as the boat made its landing, he called out: "Say, you'd better be gettin' them togs off. I'll be back here for you at a quarter to seven."

The boy, leaping lightly from rock to rock, grinned without answering. The picturesque dress suited him, he looked almost handsome, and with the feathered cap on his golden wig set rakishly ablaze, he moved downward with a taunting debonaire swagger. Gabriel didn't like him, anyway, and now his impudent face, framed by the drooping blond curls, looked to the launch man malignantly spiteful.

But Gabriel wasn't going to go till he'd made things clear. He appealed to Bassett, whom he had privately sized up as the only one of the outfit who was like the rational human male of his experience. Besides, he had seen that Joe Tracy respected, if not feared, the director.

"I'll be back here at quarter to seven for the Tracy boy, and I'm tellin' him he's got to be ready. I can't waste no time settin' round waitin', and if he's not here on the dot—"

"That's all right," Bassett put a comforting hand on his shoulder and turned to Joe. "You heard that, Joe?"

The boy answered with his sneering grin: "What's got the old geezer? Does he think I'm as deaf as he is?"

Gabriel's weather-beaten face reddened. He was not in the habit of being called on "old geezer," and he was not deaf. But the actors, it is to be noted, were a peculiar set. They had a habit of making fun in any old way, and turn on the current. In a chorus of farewells the boat chugged off.

The three men left on the wharf went up the path to the doorway, where Shine and Mrs. Cornell had resumed their seats. Shine was struck by their difference of type; if you went the world over you couldn't find three more varied specimens. The only one he liked was Bassett—something square and solid about him and a good, straight look in his eyes. And he'd a lot of authority—the way he managed this wild-eyed bunch showed that.

They stopped at the steps, and Joe Tracy made his good-bys. He was going camping in the woods with his friend Jimmy Travers, who was to meet him at Bangor tonight. They'd stay there twenty-four hours getting their stuff together, then be off for the northern solitudes—no beaten tracks for them. He left, jauntily swinging his killed skirts, a whistled tune on his lips. Soon after, Stokes departed, saying he was going to change his clothes.

A door to the right opened into the entrance hall. Here he and his wife occupied a round-floor room. He listened at the panel before he entered, then softly turned the knob, and inside, as he softly closed the door, a faint light from his hand lamp told him that a woman was in the room. An avid experimenter sharpened his features and directed his hands, pulling open his valise and taking from it a small leather case. Moving back from the window, he pushed up his sleeve, took the hypodermic from the case and pressed the needle. When he had restored the bag to its place he

threw himself on the bed and lay with closed eyes, feeling the ineffable comfort, grateful as an influx of life, vitalize and soothe his tortured being.

Mrs. Cornell and Shine rose up and followed him. Mrs. Cornell had her packing to get through and wanted Miss Pinkney's help. Shine was going to see if the pantry would do for a darkroom, intending to take some flashlight photographs of the company that evening. He had found in a cabinet all the flashlight requisites, and thought it would be an interesting memento of their visit—each of them to have a picture.

"They've got everything here," he said, as he pointed to the corner where he had made his find. "Not alone all the supplies, but two first-class cameras and a projector. I suppose some of the family took it up as a feud."

Shine, who was domiciled in the butler's bedroom, disappeared into the adjoining pantry, and Mrs. Cornell trotted resolutely on into the kitchen, being one of the few members of the company who was not afraid of the housekeeper.

Miss Pinkney, who was sitting upright in a stiff-backed chair, rose respectfully. She was a lean, slender woman of fifty, with tight-drawn hair and long horse face. She had disapproved bitterly of the intrusion of the actors upon the sacred precincts of Gull Island, and though she had been rigidly polite, hoped that her disapproval had got across.

Mrs. Cornell broached her request, and Miss Pinkney agreed. She was even very pleasant about it, showing a brisk, friendly alacrity—with the helper gone there'd only be a cold supper, and she could dish that up in two shakes. Together they left the kitchen, and on the stairs Mrs. Cornell hooked her plump arm into Miss Pinkney's, and both of them when Mrs. Shine took the flashlights that night he must take one of them as the "feeder" and the other as the "fed."

Bassett had gone into the house, too. As he crossed the living room he noticed its deserted quietude, in contrast to his racket and bustle that had possessed it an hour ago. He opened the door into the hall; there again all was quiet, none of the jarring accents that occasionally rose from the Stokes' room. He walked across the gleaming parquet to the library, which he had used for his office. Two long French windows framed a view of the channel and Hayworth dreaming among its elms. He went to one of the windows and looked out. The girls were still sitting there, and as he looked at them an experience of infinite tenderness lay like a light on his face. It was the light Shine had noticed allowed to break through clearly now that no one was there to see.

He sat down at the desk; there were letters for him to answer, addenda of the performance to check up. He moved the papers, looked at them, pushed them away, and resting his forehead on his hands, relinquished himself to a deep pervading happiness. Yesterday Anne had promised to marry him.

His mind, held all day to his work, now flew to her—memories of her face with the down-bent lids as he had asked her, and the look in her eyes as they met his. Beautiful eyes with her soul in them. It had been no light acceptance for her; it meant the surrender of her whole being, her life given over to his. He heard her voice again, and his face sank into his hands, his heart trembling in the passion of its dedication to her service. Anne, whom he had coveted and yearned for and thought of as far beyond his reach, his! He would be worthy of her, and he would care for her, guard her round with his two arms, a buckler against every ill that life might bring. She'd had such a hard time of it, struggling up by herself with Joe hung round her neck like a millstone.

At the memory of Joe he came to earth with a jarring impact. He dropped his hands and stared at the papers, his brows bent in harassed thought. Bassett had heard something that morning from Sybil which must be looked into—something he could hardly believe. But Joe being what he was, you never could tell. It had been a mistake to bring him, with Sybil a bunch of nerves and Stokes shunted unexpectedly into their midst. And now he felt responsible, he'd have it out with Joe before he left. One more disagreeable scene before they slipped tomorrow, and Bassett, like Mrs. Cornell, felt he'd had his Providence when they were all on the train in the morning. Meanwhile he'd go over his papers while he waited for the boy, who had gone to his room to dress. The door was open and he could hear him as he came down the stairs.

Anne was approaching the house, a slender crimson figure, her hair in the sunset light shining like black lacquer. She was smiling to herself—everything was so beautiful, not only Gull Island and this hour of tranquil glory, but the mere fact of existing! Then she

saw Flora Stokes sitting on the balcony and realized that in this golden world there were people to whom life was a dark and troublesome affair. She wanted to comfort Flora, let some of the happiness in her own heart spill over into that burdened one. But she knew no way of doing it, could only smile at the haggard face the woman lifted from her book.

"Oh, Mrs. Stokes, reading," she cried as she ran up the steps. "How can you read on such an evening as this?"

Flora Stokes said she had been walking about till she was tired, and then glanced at the distant rock.

"You've left Sybil out there." There was no comfort or consolation that could penetrate Mrs. Stokes' obsession. Anne could only reassure: "She's coming in soon. She just wanted to see the end of the sunset."

She passed into the hall, sorry—oh, so sorry! But the library door was open and she halted, poised birdlike for one glance. The man at the desk had his back to her and she said nothing, yet he turned, and jumped up. She shut her eyes as she felt his arms go about her and his kisses on her hair, her senses blurred in a strange, ineffably sweet confusion of timidity and delight.

"Darling," he breathed, when the glass was over, "I thought you were never coming."

"I had to stay with Sybil. She didn't want to be alone."

"But you wanted to be here?" "Just here," she laid a finger on his breast and broke into smothered, breathless laughter.

He laughed, too, and they drew apart, their hands sliding together and interlocking. It was all so new, so bewilderingly entrancing, that they did not know how to express it, the man staring wonder-struck, the girl, with her quivering laughter that was close to tears, looking this way and that, not knowing where to look.

"I ought to go," she whispered. "They'll be coming," but made no move.

"Wait till they do." Then with a sudden practical facing of realities, "When will we be married?" "Oh, not for ages! I'm not used to being engaged yet!"

"I am—I never was before, but I must have had a talent for it, I've taken to it so well."

"Oh, that!" Her laughter came more naturally, his with it. They were like a pair of children, delighting in a little secret. "Won't they be surprised when they hear? Nobody has a suspicion of it."

She looked so enchanting with her eyebrows arched in mischievous query that he made a movement to clasp her again, and then came the creak of an opening door from the floor above.

"Hist!" she held up a warning hand and slipped away, her face, glancing back for a last look, beautiful in its radiant joy.

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